

Oceana Reveals Mislabeling of America's Favorite Fish: Salmon

43% of Salmon Samples Tested in Grocery Stores & Restaurants Misabeled

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Contact: Dustin Cranor: dcranor@Oceana.org 954.348.1314



WASHINGTON – Oceana released a [new study](#) today that reveals mislabeling of America's favorite fish – salmon. Oceana collected 82 salmon samples from restaurants and grocery stores and found that 43 percent were mislabeled. DNA testing confirmed that most of the mislabeling (69 percent) consisted of farmed Atlantic salmon being sold as wild-caught product.

"Americans might love salmon, but as our study reveals, they may be falling victim to a bait and switch," said Beth Lowell, senior campaign director at Oceana. "When consumers opt for wild-caught U.S. salmon, they don't expect to get a farmed or lower-value product of questionable origins. This type of seafood fraud can have serious ecological and economic consequences. Not only are consumers getting ripped off, but responsible U.S. fishermen are being cheated when fraudulent products lower the price for their hard-won catch."

Oceana found mislabeled salmon everywhere it tested, including 48 percent of the samples in Virginia (includes Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Newport News, Williamsburg, Richmond and Fredericksburg), 45 percent in Washington, D.C., 38 percent in Chicago, IL and 37 percent in New York, NY. Salmon samples were considered to be mislabeled if 1) they were described as being "wild," "Alaskan" or "Pacific," but DNA testing revealed them to be farmed Atlantic salmon; or 2) the samples were labeled as a specific type of salmon, like "Chinook," but testing revealed them to be different species (in most cases lower-value fish).

"While U.S. fishermen catch enough salmon to satisfy 80 percent of our domestic demand, 70 percent of that catch is then exported instead of going directly to American grocery stores and restaurants," said Dr. Kimberly Warner, report author and senior scientist at Oceana. "It's anyone's guess how much of our wild domestic salmon makes its way back to the U.S. after being processed abroad. Without traceability, it is nearly impossible to follow the fish from the farm or fishing boat

to the dinner plate. What we end up eating is mostly cheaper, imported farmed salmon, sometimes masquerading as U.S. wild-caught fish.”

Oceana’s salmon samples were collected during the winter of 2013-2014, when wild salmon were out-of-season. This mislabeling rate (43 percent) differed greatly from Oceana’s [nationwide survey in 2013](#), which found low rates (7 percent) of mislabeled salmon collected primarily in grocery stores at the peak of the 2012 commercial salmon fishing season, when wild salmon was plentiful in the market.

When looking at all of Oceana’s salmon data combined (466 samples in total), we are able to make the following conclusions:

- Diners were five times more likely to be misled in restaurants than grocery stores (38 percent vs. 7 percent).

- Consumers are less likely to be misled in large grocery store chains that are required to give additional information about seafood.

- Salmon purchased out-of-season from all retail types was three times more likely to be mislabeled than salmon purchased during the commercial fishing season (23 percent vs. 8 percent, respectively).

Last year, the White House established the Presidential Task Force on Combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing and Seafood Fraud. Oceana is now calling on the Obama administration to follow through on its commitment to tackle these important issues.

“The federal government should provide consumers with assurances that the seafood they purchase is safe, legally caught and honestly labeled,” said Lowell. “Traceability needs to be required for all seafood to ensure important information about which species it is, whether it was farmed or wild caught, and how and where it was caught follows all seafood from boat (or farm) to plate. Providing consumers with more information about their seafood allows them to make more informed decisions, whether it is for health, economic or environmental reasons.”

Background:

Since 2011, Oceana has worked to stop seafood fraud in the United States.

Oceana’s previous investigations of [fish](#), [shrimp](#) and [crab cakes](#) in retail markets and restaurants in the U.S. clearly demonstrate that traceability requirements need to apply to all seafood and extend through the full supply chain to the end consumer. On average, one-third of the seafood examined in these studies was mislabeled – the product listed on the label or menu was different than what the buyer actually received, often a less desirable or lower-priced species. Oceana has observed

threatened species being sold as more sustainable, expensive varieties replaced with cheaper alternatives, and fish that can cause illness substituted in place of those that are safe to eat.

In 2014, Oceana also conducted the most current and comprehensive [review](#) of seafood fraud literature to date, compiling 103 studies in 29 countries and on all continents except Antarctica. Every study found some level of seafood fraud, demonstrating that it is not just an issue that narrowly affects a handful of species or regions. In the U.S. alone, 50 different types of seafood have been found mislabeled, with over 150 species substituted in their place.

This July, Reps. Blake Farenthold (R-TX) and Stephen Lynch (D-MA) introduced the [Protecting Honest Fishermen Act of 2015](#), which would ensure that traceability requirements apply to all seafood species, extend through the full supply chain and provide more information to consumers.

To access Oceana's full report and other materials, as well as learn how consumers can reduce their chances of falling victim to a bait and switch when buying salmon, please visit www.oceana.org/salmonfraud.